



Young People's Participation in Decision Making in Scotland: Attitudes and Perceptions



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING IN SCOTLAND: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

**Children and Families Analysis
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Key Findings

This report presents findings on children's perceptions of their involvement in decision making from the 2019 Young People in Scotland survey. The survey asked respondents a number of questions about their ability to make their views heard and acted on in decisions that affect their lives, focusing on adults in general, adults running out of school activities, and schools.

The Young People in Scotland Survey is an online omnibus survey of secondary school pupils across Scotland. The questions were previously included in the survey in 2017. Fieldwork was conducted by Ipsos MORI Scotland and analysis and reporting was conducted by the Scottish Government, Children and Families Analytical Unit.

Perceptions of adults listening and acting on views

- Pupils were asked about the extent to which adults in general (such as family, teachers, youth workers etc.) were (1) good at listening to their views; and (2) good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them.
- Around six in ten young people surveyed agreed that adults were good at listening to their views (57 per cent). This was similar to findings in 2017.
- Around six in ten of young people surveyed (58 per cent) agreed that adults were good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them. This was an increase from 2017, when 53 per cent agreed.
- Boys were more positive on both questions. Boys were more likely than girls to agree that adults were good at listening (59 per cent compared with 55 per cent) and that they were good at taking their views in account when making decisions (61 per cent compared with 55 per cent).
- Older children were more negative. The percentage of pupils who agreed that adults are good at listening fell from 61 per cent in S1 to 51 per cent in S6, while the percentage agreeing that they were good at taking their views in account when making decisions fell from 63 per cent in S1 to 53 per cent in S6.
- Respondents with a mental or physical health condition were less positive. Among those with a health condition, 54 per cent agreed that adults were good at listening to their views, compared with 61 per cent of those without a health condition. Similarly, 54 per cent of those with a health condition agreed that adults were good at taking their views into account compared to 62 per cent of those without a health condition.

Barriers to being listened to and having views heard

- Young people were asked what they saw as the barriers to adults listening to them and taking their views into account.
- The most commonly selected perceived reason for why adults do not listen to young people was 'it doesn't fit with what they want to hear' (26 per cent),

followed by 'they don't like their views being challenged' (23 per cent). Around a quarter (23 per cent) selected 'nothing – they do listen' and a further 21 per cent said they didn't know.

- The most commonly selected perceived reason for what stops adults from taking young people's views into account was 'they don't like their views being challenged' (20%). Three in ten selected 'don't know' and a quarter selected 'nothing – they do take my views into account'.
- For both of these questions, pupils were more likely to say that there was no barrier as adults do listen to them compared with responses in 2017.
- Girls were more likely than boys to select each of the barriers as a reason for why adults don't listen to young people. Those in later school years were more likely to select most of the barriers, and were also less likely to say that there were no barriers.

Perceptions of adults running out of school activities

- Young people who took part in out of school groups or activities run by adults were asked about the extent to which (1) they felt able to let adults know their views on how the activities are run (2) those adults were good at listening to their views and (3) those adults were good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them.
- Around two thirds of young people who took part in out of school groups or activities run by adults held positive views about these adults. Sixty seven per cent of respondents agreed that they felt able to let these adults know their views on how the activities were run; 65 per cent felt that the adults were good at listening to their views; and 64 per cent felt that these adults were good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them. This was similar to findings in 2017.
- Those with a health conditions were more negative about adults running out of school activities on all three questions. Boys were more likely than girls to say they felt able to make their views known, and that those adults were good at listening to their views. Young people from the most deprived areas were least likely to feel that adults running out of school activities listen to their views or take their views into account, but there was not a consistent relationship over the five SIMD quintiles.

Perceptions of say in the running of schools

- Respondents were also asked a series of questions about how much say they had relating to schools, in terms of what they learn, how they learn and decisions affecting the school as a whole.
- Thirty four per cent of respondents felt that they had a lot or some say in what they learn while over half (51 per cent) felt that they had little or no say.

- When asked about how much say they have in how they learn, 36 per cent felt that they had a lot or some say in and 45 per cent felt they had no or little say.
- Twenty nine per cent felt that they had a lot or some say in decisions that affected the whole school while over half (51 per cent) felt that they had little or no say.
- There was little variation from responses in 2017.

1. Introduction

This report presents findings from a survey of secondary school pupils in Scotland on perceptions of their ability to influence decisions that affect their lives. The aim of the research was to better understand the extent to which young people feel they can make their views heard and that those views are acted on by adults in general, in and out of school activities and at school.

Background

In 2018, the Scottish Government published the Progressing the Human Rights of Children in Scotland Action Plan 2018-2021¹ which identifies actions to work towards “A Scotland where children are recognised as citizens in their own right and where their human rights are embedded in all aspects of society; a Scotland where policy, law and decision making takes account of children’s rights and where all children have a voice and are empowered to be human rights defenders.”

One of the four areas of action identified in the action plan is to develop a strategic approach to children and young people’s participation, building on the legacy of the Year of Young People (YOYP) 2018. This aim is to mainstream the participation of children and young people in decision-making across Scottish society.

The findings of this report will provide an understanding of young people’s involvement in decision making in schools and out of school activities and groups, as well as any variation between different sociodemographic groups.

Methods

The Young People in Scotland Survey is an online omnibus survey run by Ipsos MORI Scotland, which surveys a representative sample of pupils in Scotland aged 11 to 18 in 50 state secondary schools in Scotland. Fieldwork was carried out between 16 September and 26 November 2019 and 1731 pupils responded. The data was weighted by gender, year group, urban-rural classification, and SIMD classification.²

The analysis and reporting was undertaken by the Scottish Government, Children and Families Analytical Services.

¹ Scottish Government (2018) the Progressing the Human Rights of Children in Scotland Action Plan 2018-2021 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/progressing-human-rights-children-scotland-action-plan-2018-2021/>

² The survey was part of the wider 2019 Young People in Scotland omnibus survey conducted by Ipsos MORI Scotland.

2. Views Towards Adults in General

The first set of questions asked about young people's perceptions of whether adults in general, listened to their views and took their views into account, when making decisions that affect them. Pupils were also asked what they think stops these adults from listening to their views and taking them into account.

Adults listening to young people

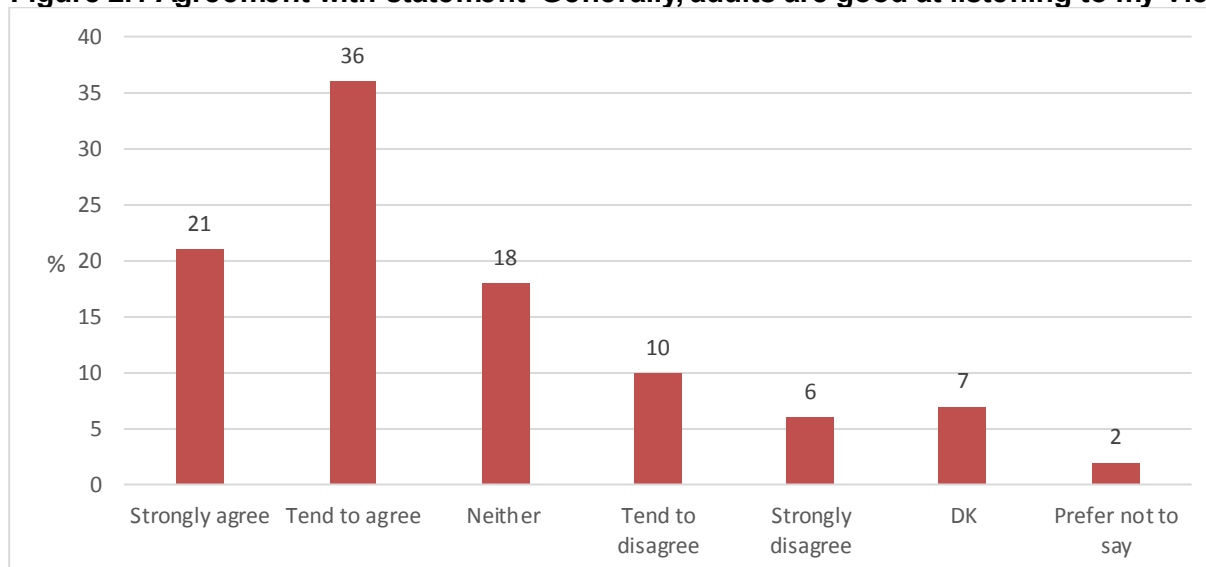
Pupils were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that adults in general, such as their family, teachers, youth workers, sport coaches and Scouts/Guides leaders, were good at listening to their views.

Pupils were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- Generally, adults are good at listening to my views
- Generally, adults are good at taking my views into accounts when making decisions that affect me

When asked about adults in general, over half (57 per cent) of young people surveyed agreed that adults were good at listening to their views) while 16 percent disagreed. Figure 2.1 illustrates.

Figure 2.1 Agreement with statement 'Generally, adults are good at listening to my views'

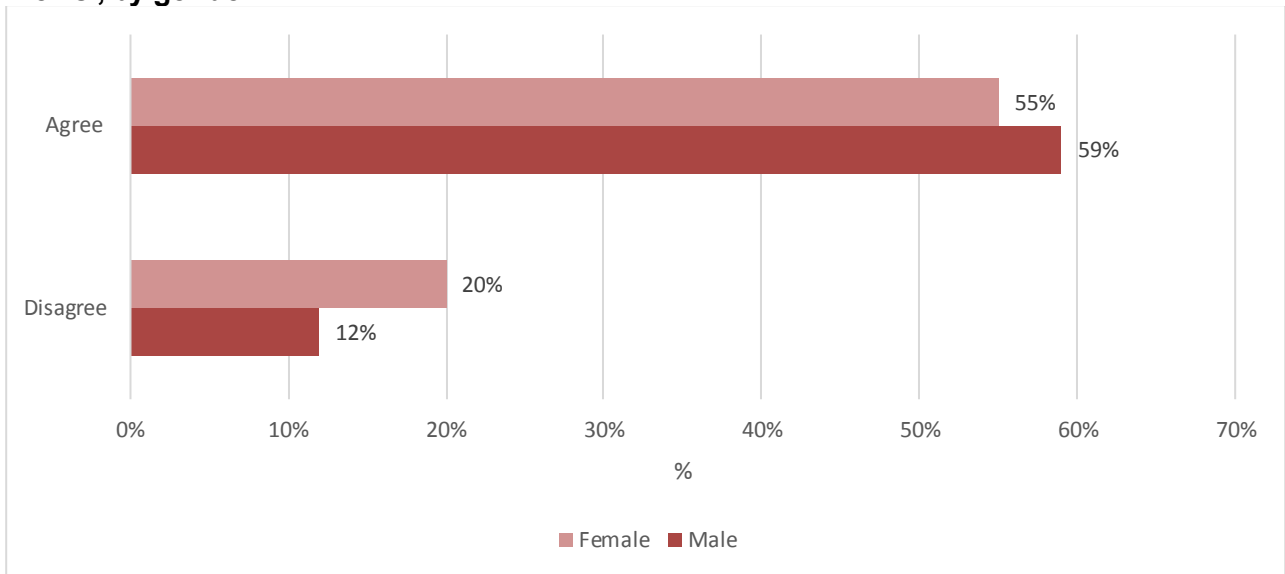


Base: 1731

Compared with responses in 2017, when 58 per cent agreed and 21 per cent disagreed there has been little change.

As Figure 2.2 shows, boys were more likely to agree than girls, with 59 per cent of boys agreeing that adults listen to their views compared with 55 per cent of girls.

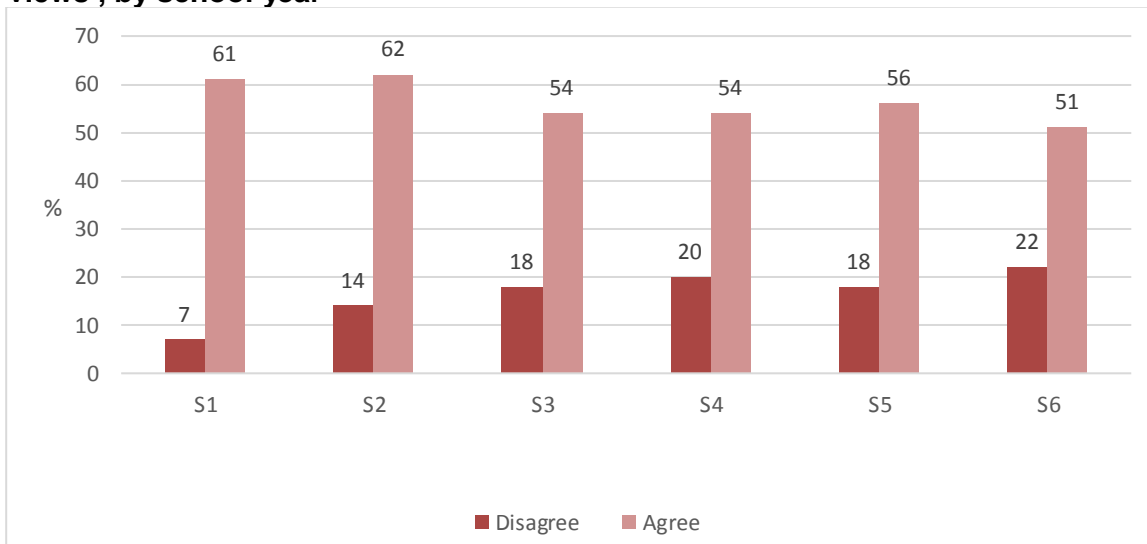
Figure 2.2 Agreement with the statement ‘Generally, adults are good at listening to my views’, by gender



Base: 1731

As Figure 2.3 shows, the percentage of those who felt that adults were good at listening to their views broadly decreased with school year. In S1, 61 per cent of respondents felt that adults were good at listening to their views, compared with 51 per cent in S6 (Figure 2.3).

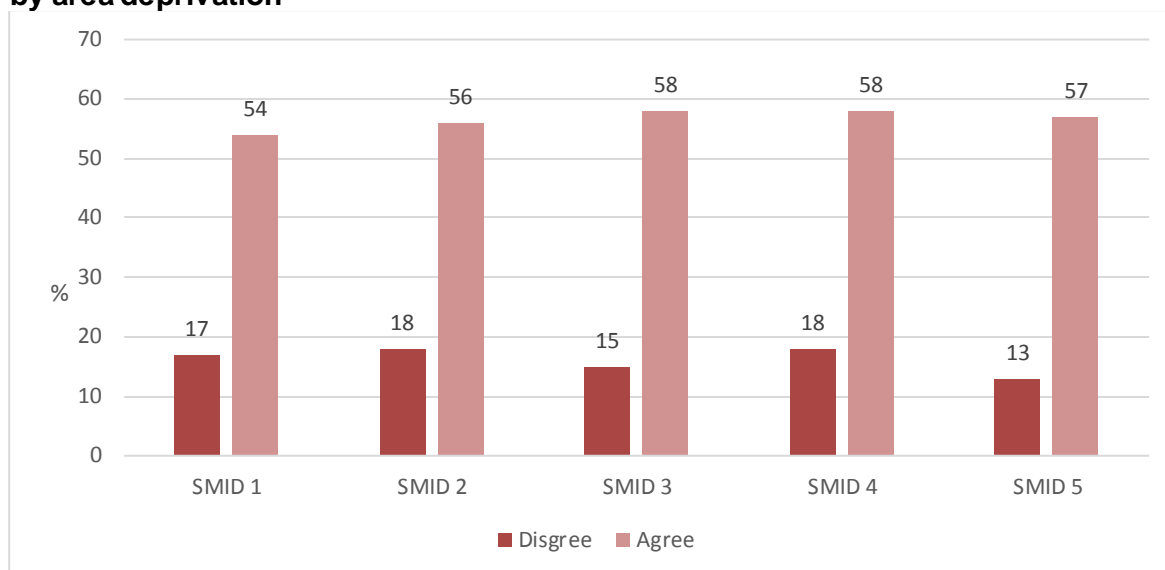
Figure 2.3 Agreement with statement ‘Generally, adults are good at listening to my views’, by school year



Base: 1731

Respondents with a mental or physical health condition were less positive than those without. Of those with a health condition, 54 per cent felt that adults were good at listening to their views, compared with 61 percent of those without a health condition.

Figure 2.4 Agreement with statement ‘Generally, adults are good at listening to my views’, by area deprivation



Base: 1731

There was little variation between respondents from different Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintiles.³

Adults taking young people’s views into account

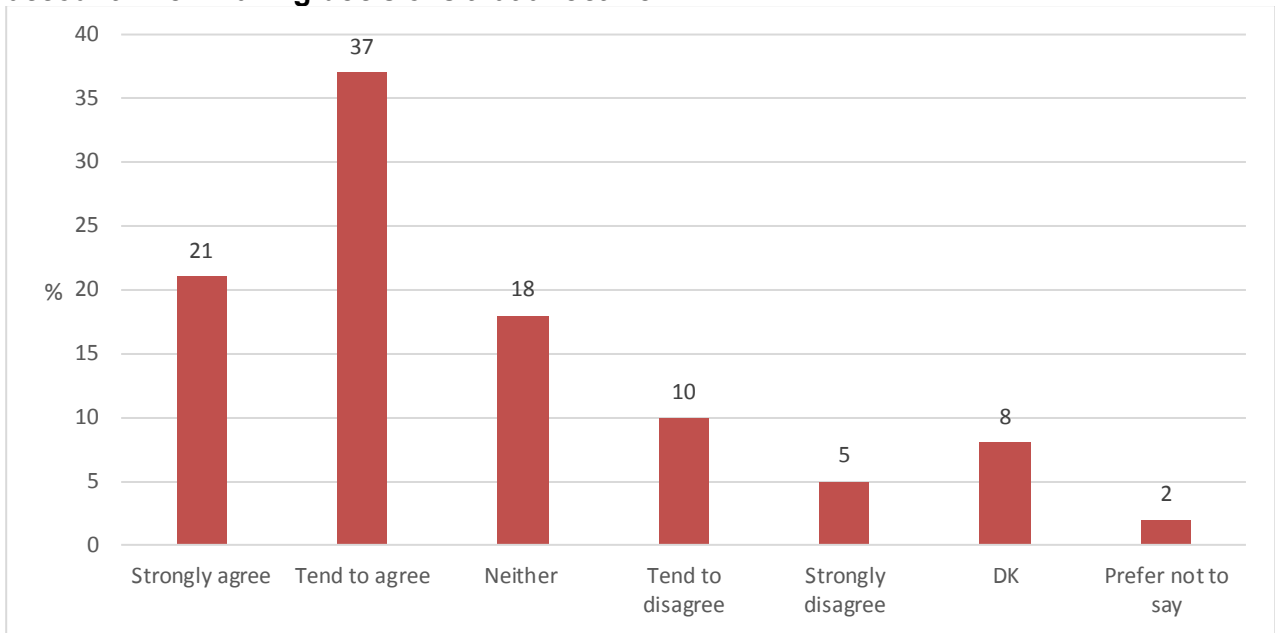
Young people were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that adults in general, such as their family, teachers, youth workers, sports coaches or Scouts/Guides leaders, were good at taking their views into accounts when making decisions that affect them. This question was intended to gauge whether young people feel that adults take action after listening to their views.

As Figure 2.4 shows, 58 per cent of respondents agreed that adults in general were good at taking their views into consideration when making decisions that affected them, while 15 per cent disagreed with this statement.

Since the last survey conducted in 2017, respondents have become more positive in response to this question. In 2017, 53 per cent of respondents felt that adults were good at taking their views into accounts and 19 per cent disagreed.

³ The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across all of Scotland in a consistent way. It ranks small areas (data zones) from most deprived to least deprived. SIMD quintiles are bands containing 20% of data zones, from most deprived (SIMD 1) to least deprived (SIMD 5).

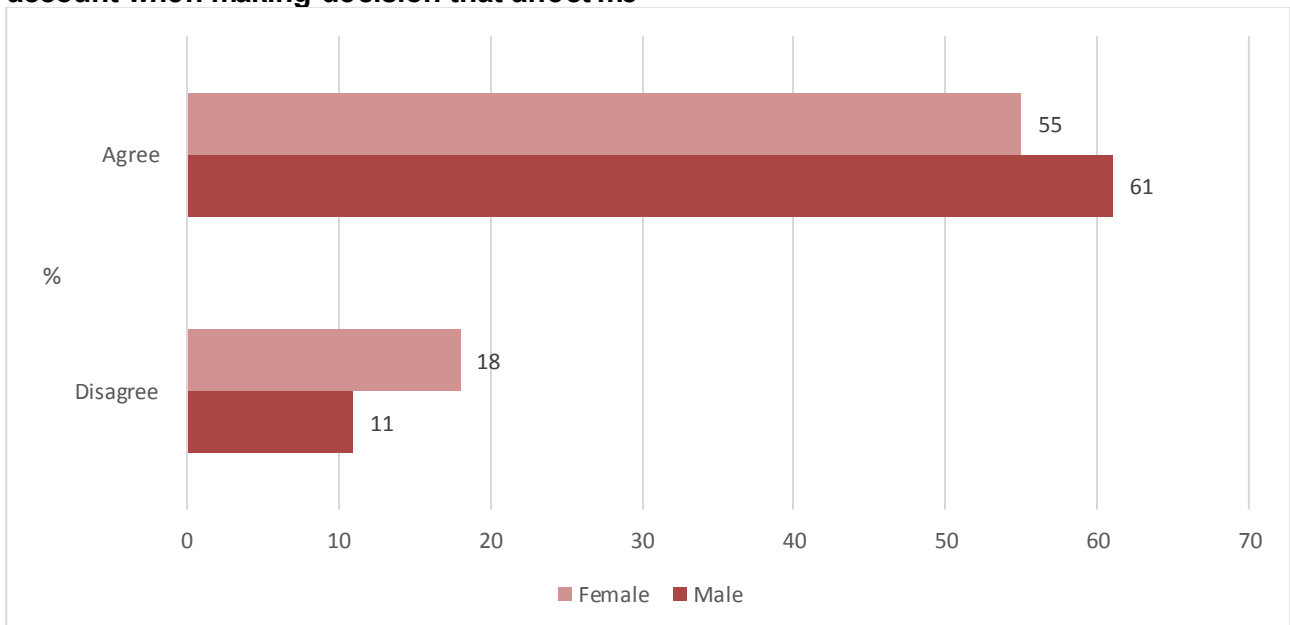
Figure 2.5 Agreement with the statement ‘Generally, adults are good at taking my views into account when making decisions that affect me’



Base: 1731

Boys were more positive than girls. As Figure 2.5 shows, 61 per cent of boys agreed that adults in general were good at taking their views into accounts compared with 55 per cent of girls.

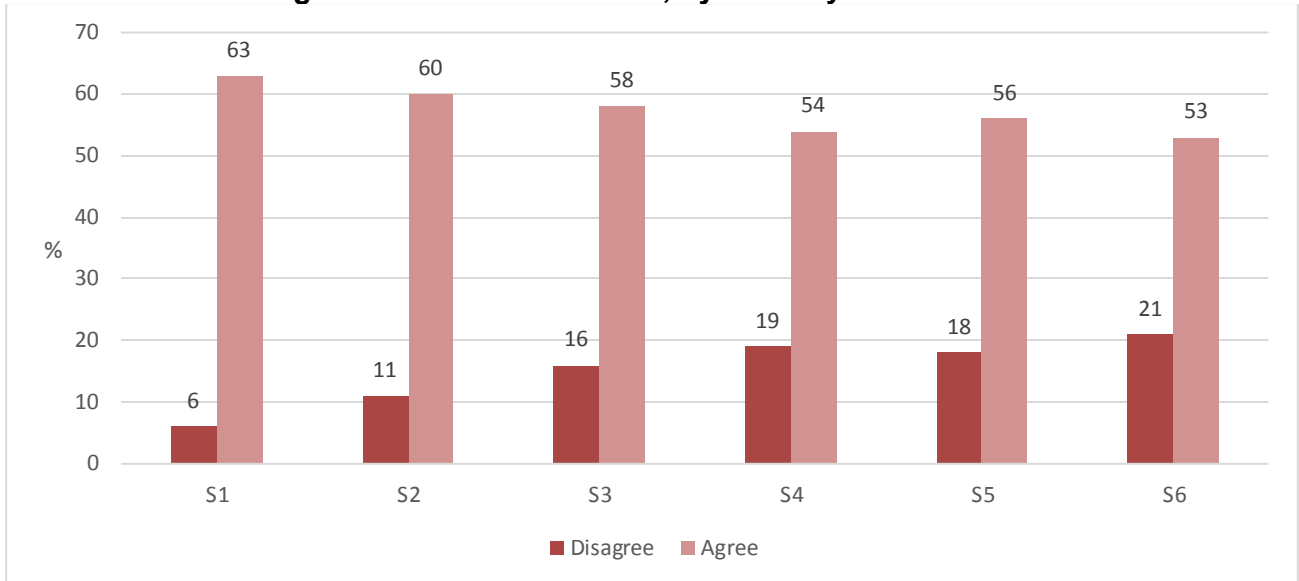
Figure 2.6 Agreement with the statement ‘Generally, adults are good at taking my views into account when making decision that affect me’



Base: 1731

Perceptions worsened between S1 and S6. As Figure 2.6 shows, 63 per cent of respondents in S1 felt that adults were good at listening to their views, compared with 53 per cent of respondents in S6.

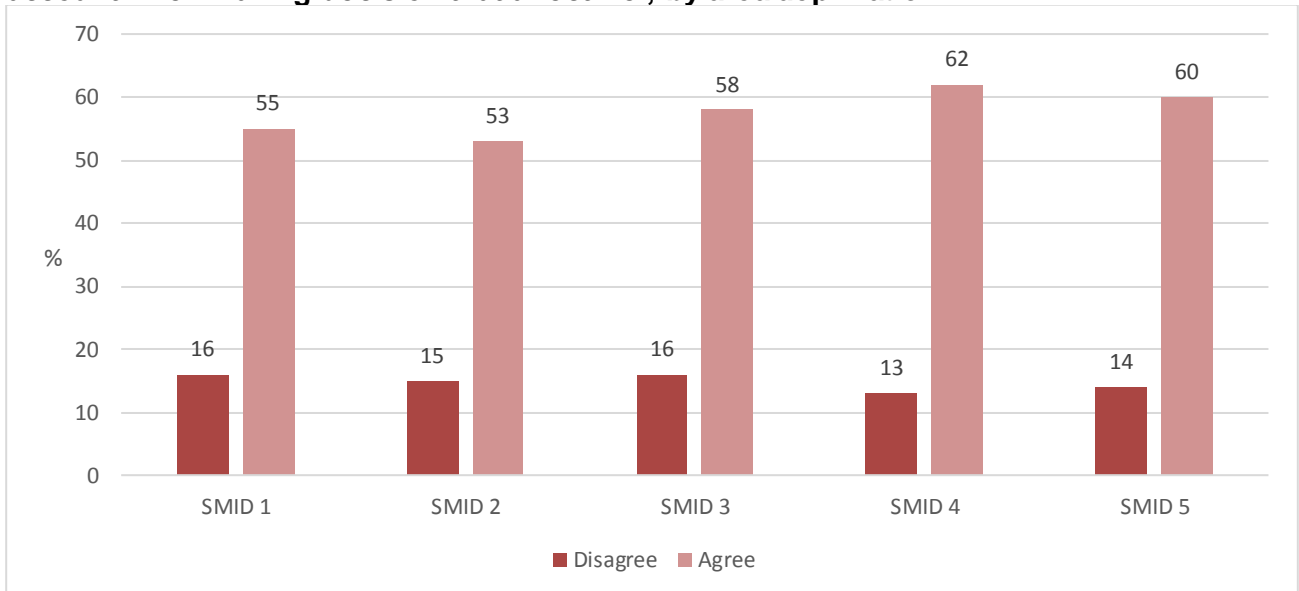
Figure 2.7 Agreement with the statement ‘Generally, adults are good at taking my views into account when making decisions that affect me’, by school year



Base: 1731

Pupils with a mental or physical health condition were more likely to disagree that adults take their views into account when making decisions that affect them. Pupils without a health condition were more likely to agree that adults were good at taking their views into account (62 per cent) than those with a health condition (54 per cent).

Figure 2.8 Agreement with the statement ‘Generally, adults are good at taking my views into account when making decision that affect me’, by area deprivation



Base: 1731

As Figure 2.8 shows, those in SIMD 4 were the most likely to agree that adults take their views into account (62 per cent) while those in SIMD 2 were the least likely to agree (53 per cent).

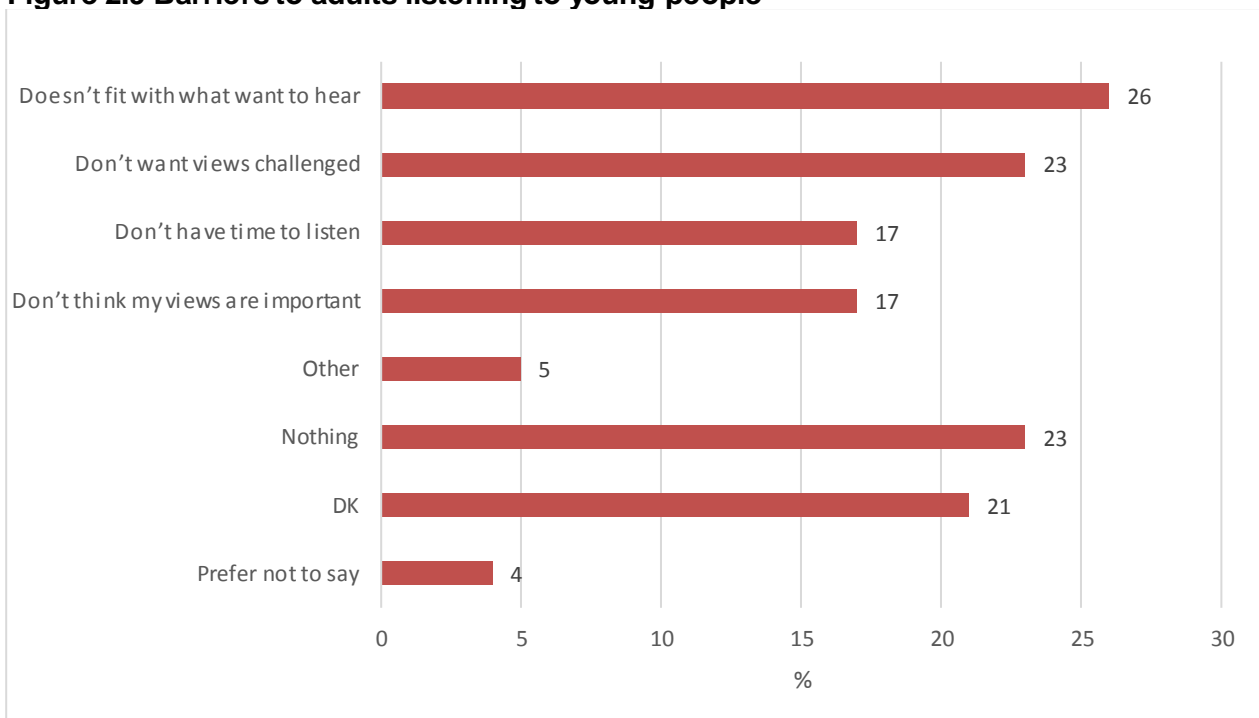
Barriers to listening

Respondents were asked what, if anything they thought stopped adults in general listening to their views.

The most commonly selected reason for why adults do not listen to young people was 'it doesn't fit with what they want to hear' (26 per cent) followed by 'they don't like their views being challenged' (23 per cent). Around a quarter (23 per cent) selected 'nothing – they do listen' and a further 21 per cent said they didn't know.

Compared with responses from 2017, pupils were less likely to select any barrier. The percentage selecting no barrier increased from 14 per cent in 2017 to 23 per cent in 2019, while the percentage saying adults 'don't have time to listen' or 'don't think my views are important' decreased substantially from 30 per cent and 28 per cent respectively to 17 per cent for both.

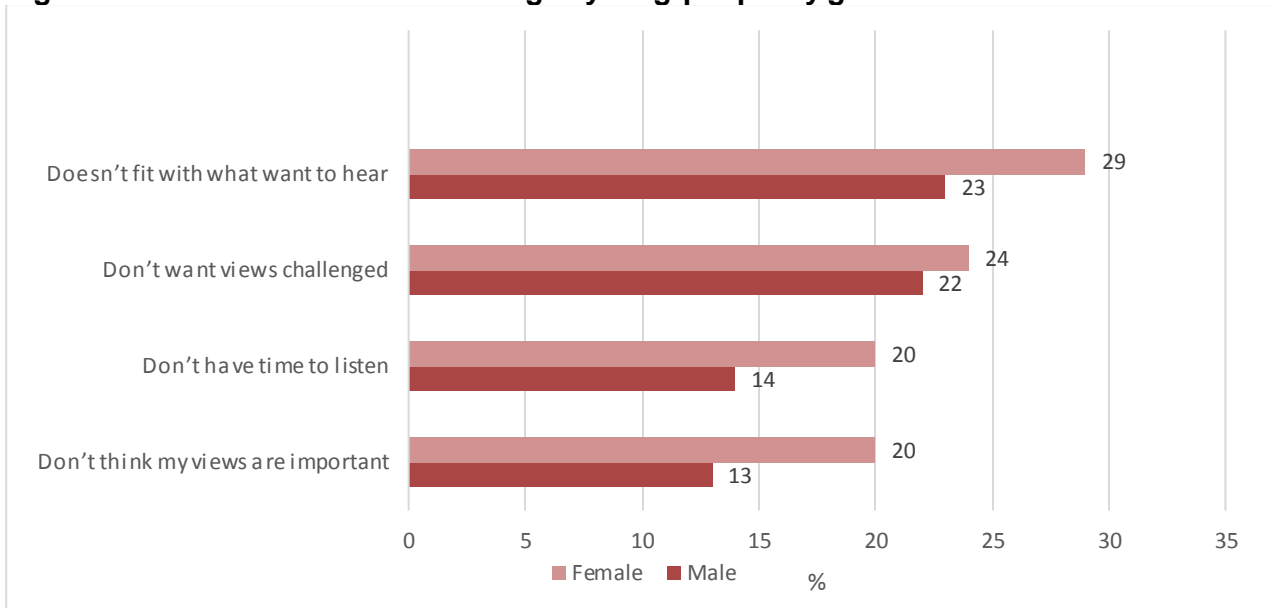
Figure 2.9 Barriers to adults listening to young people



Base: 1731

Girls were more likely than boys to select each of the barriers as a reason for why adults do not listen to young people. Boys (26 per cent) were more likely to select no barriers than girls (20 per cent). Figure 2.10 illustrates.

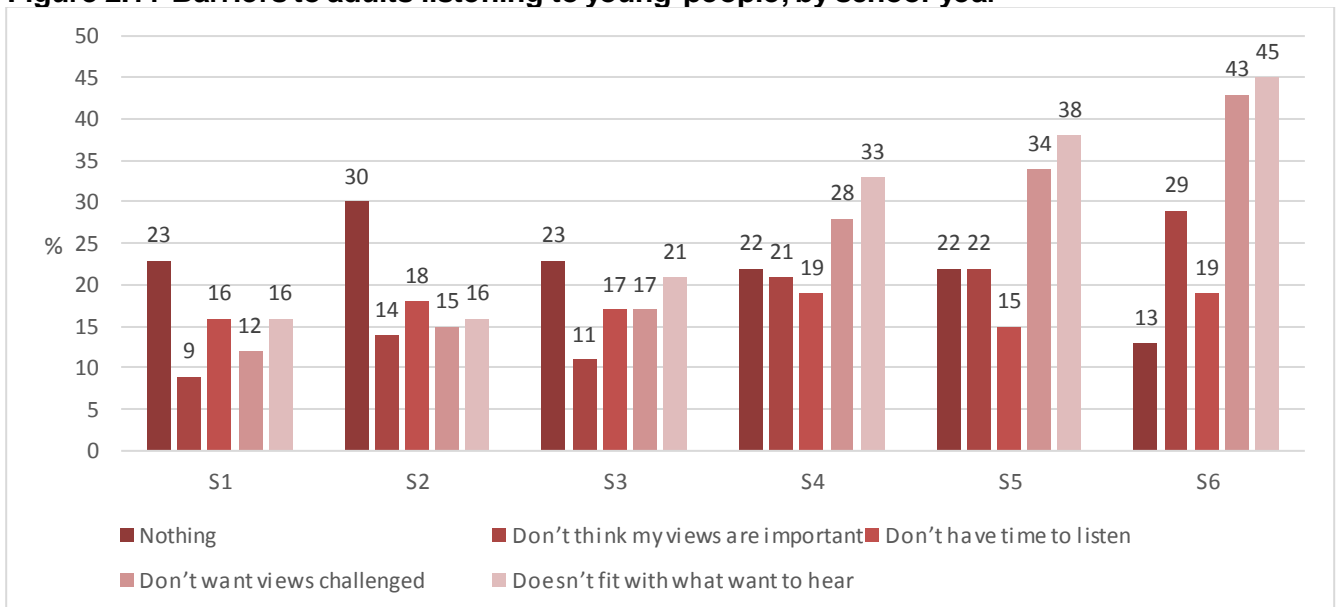
Figure 2.10 Barriers to adults listening to young people by gender



Base: 1731

Pupils in later school years were more likely to select most of the barriers as a reason for why adults don't listen to them. The percentage selecting that 'nothing – they do listen' also decreased from S2 (30 per cent) to S6 (13 per cent).

Figure 2.11 Barriers to adults listening to young people, by school year



Base: 1731

Barriers to adults taking young people's views into account

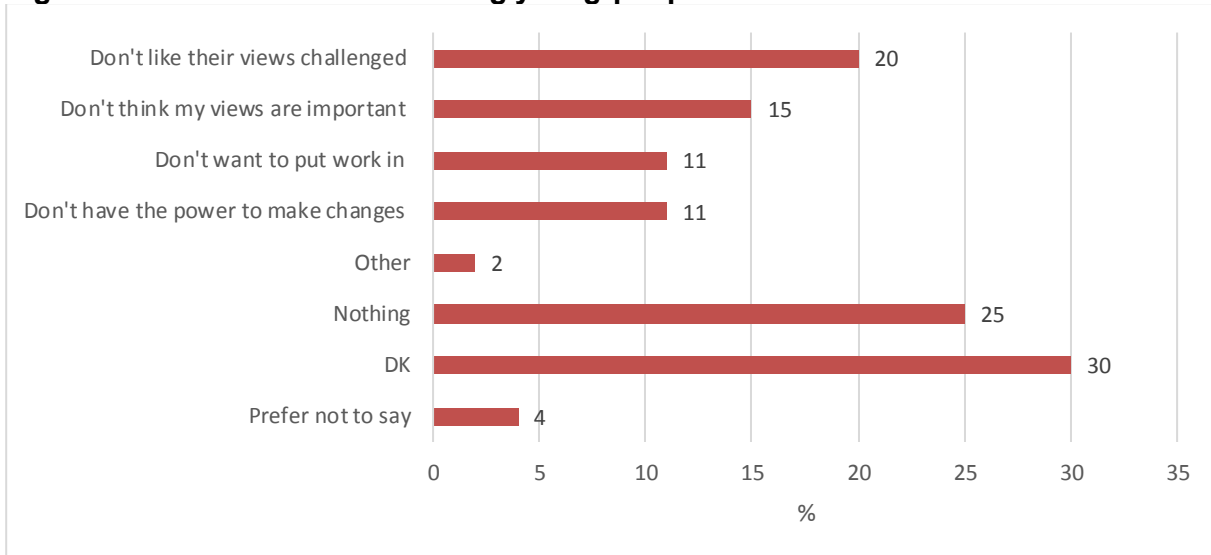
Respondents were also asked what they saw as the barriers to adults taking their views into accounts when making decisions that affect them.

As Figure 2.12 shows, the most commonly selected statement was 'don't know' (30 per cent), followed by the statement 'nothing – they do take my views into account' (25 per cent).

In terms of substantive answers, the most commonly selected were ‘they don’t like their views challenged’ (20 per cent) and ‘they don’t think my views are important’ (15 per cent).

Similar to the last question, pupils were more likely to say that there was no barrier as adults do listen to them, compared with responses in 2017 (16 per cent).

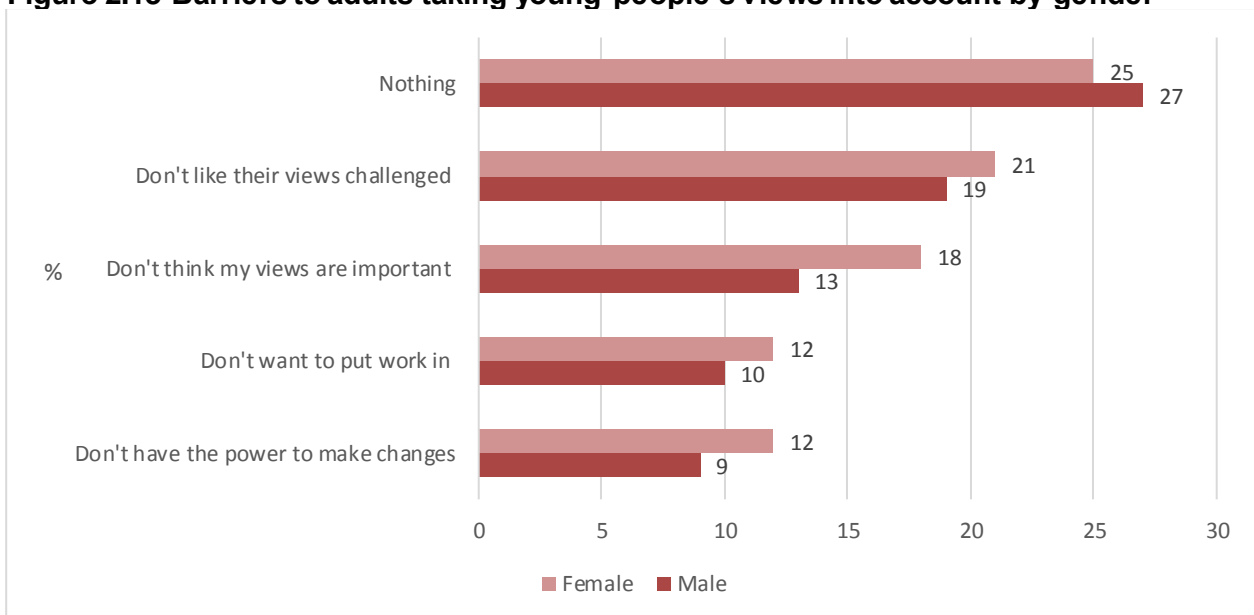
Figure 2.12 Barriers to adults taking young people’s views into account



Base: 1731

As Figure 2.13 shows, girls were slightly more likely to select all barriers, and in particular ‘they don’t think my views are important’ (18 per cent among girls, compared with 13 per cent among boys).

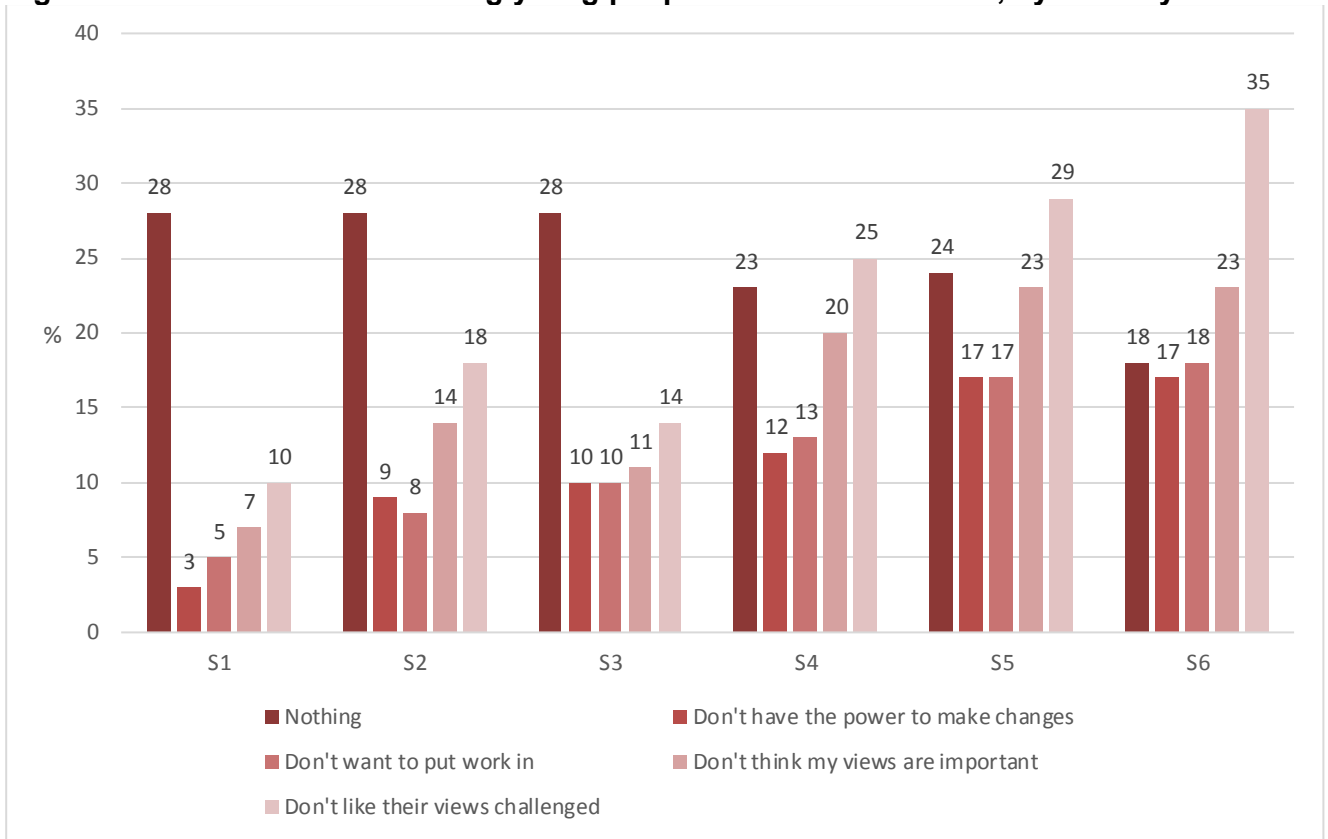
Figure 2.13 Barriers to adults taking young people’s views into account by gender



Base: 1731

The percentage selecting each barrier broadly increased with school year. As Figure 2.14 shows, there was a wide gap between S1 and S6: Pupils in S6 were over three times as likely to select each of the barriers than those in S1.

Figure 2.14 barriers to adults taking young people's views into account, by school year



Base: 1731

3. Views on decision making in out of school activities

Pupils who took part in out of school activities and groups were asked a series of questions about their perceptions of adults regarding decision making in those activities.

61 per cent took part in out of school activities. Participation was highest among pupils in S1 (67 per cent) and lowest in S4 and S6 (both 57 per cent). Pupils in the most deprived SIMD quintiles (SIMD 1 48 per cent, SIMD 2 58 per cent) were less likely to take part in out of school activities compared with those in the other quintiles (all 67 per cent). There was no difference in participation levels by gender.

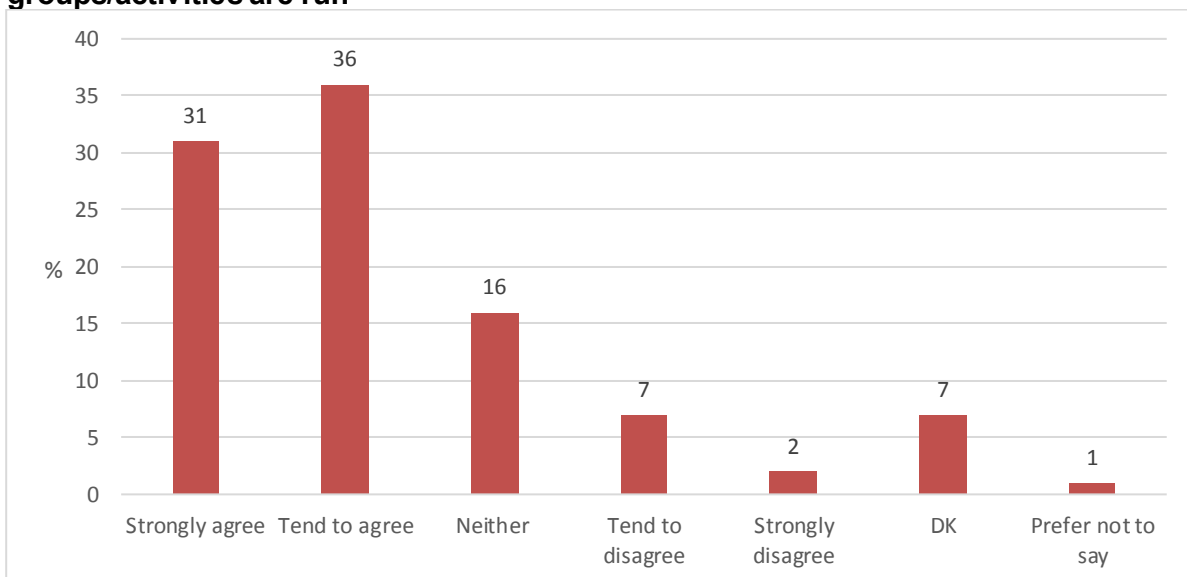
Pupils were asked to agree or disagree with three statements about the adults that run out of school activities:

- I feel able to let the adults know my views on how those groups/activities are run
- Adults are good at listening to my views, in those groups/activities.
- Adults are good at taking my views into account when making decisions that affect me, in those groups/activities.

Ability to make views known

Respondents were more positive about adults who run out of school activities and groups than about adults in general. As Figure 3.1 shows, 67 per cent of respondents who took part in out of school activities or groups felt that they were able to let adults know their views on how the activities were run while only 9 per cent disagreed.

Figure 3.1 Agreement with statement 'I feel able to let adults know my views on how the groups/activities are run'

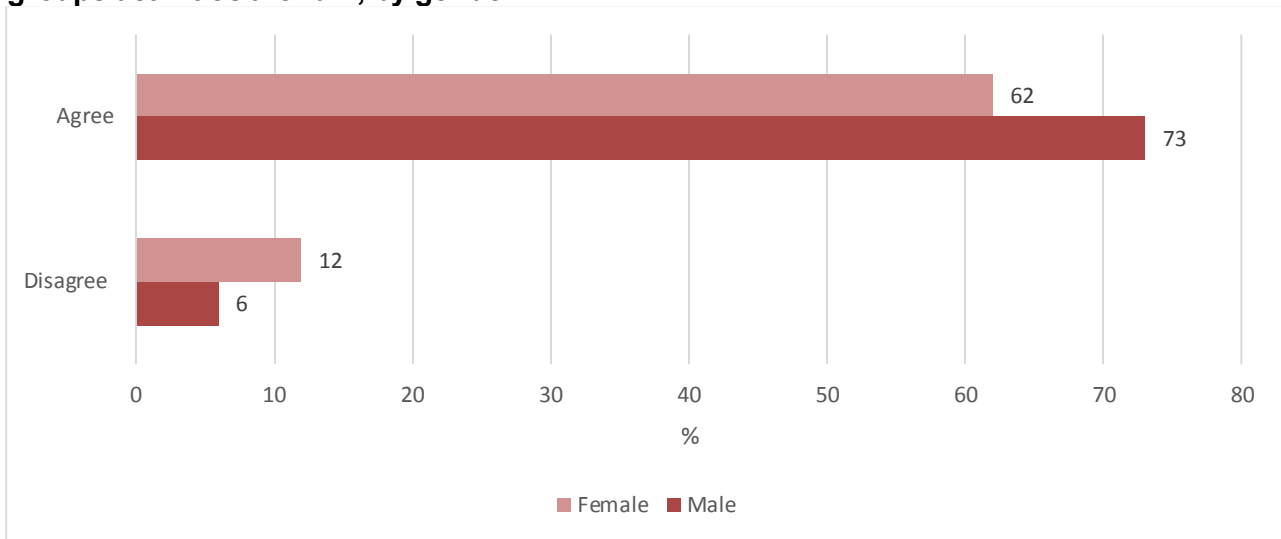


Base: 1085

There was no significant change in responses from 2017, when 70 percent agreed and 8 per cent disagreed.

Boys were more positive about adults who run out of school activities or groups than girls. Figure 3.2 shows that 73 per cent of boys felt able to let adults know their views on how activities are run, compared with 62 per cent of girls.

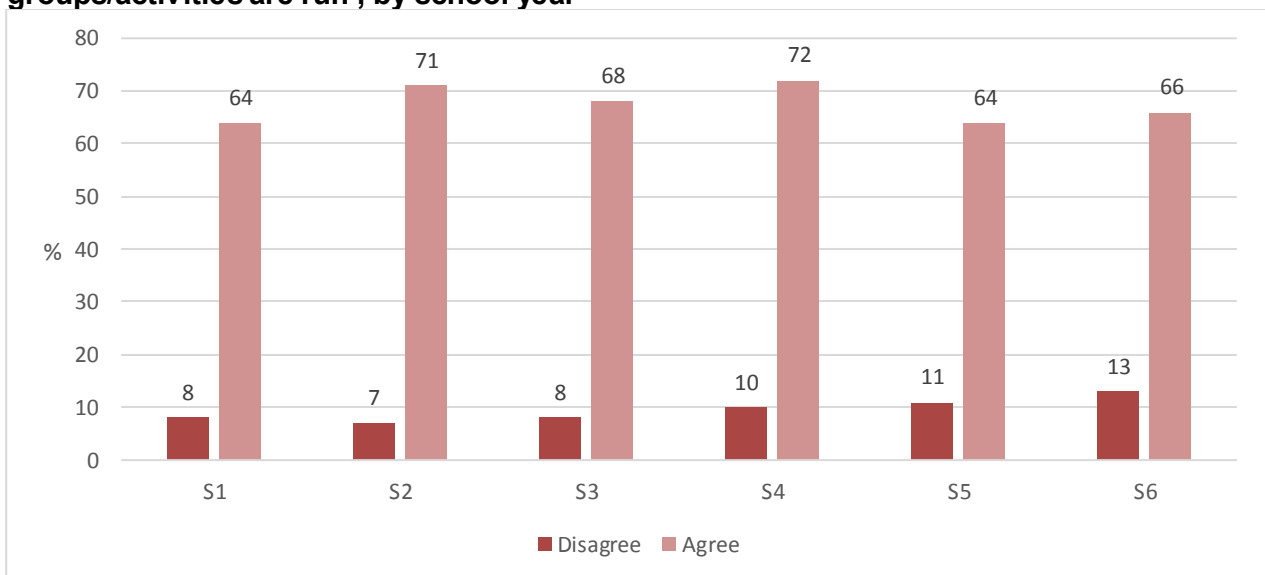
Figure 3.2 Agreement with the statement 'I feel able to let adults know my views on how the groups/activities are run', by gender



Base: 1085

As Figure 3.3 shows, pupils in S4 were most likely to agree (72 per cent) that they could make their views known while pupils in S1 and S5 were least likely to agree (both 64 per cent).

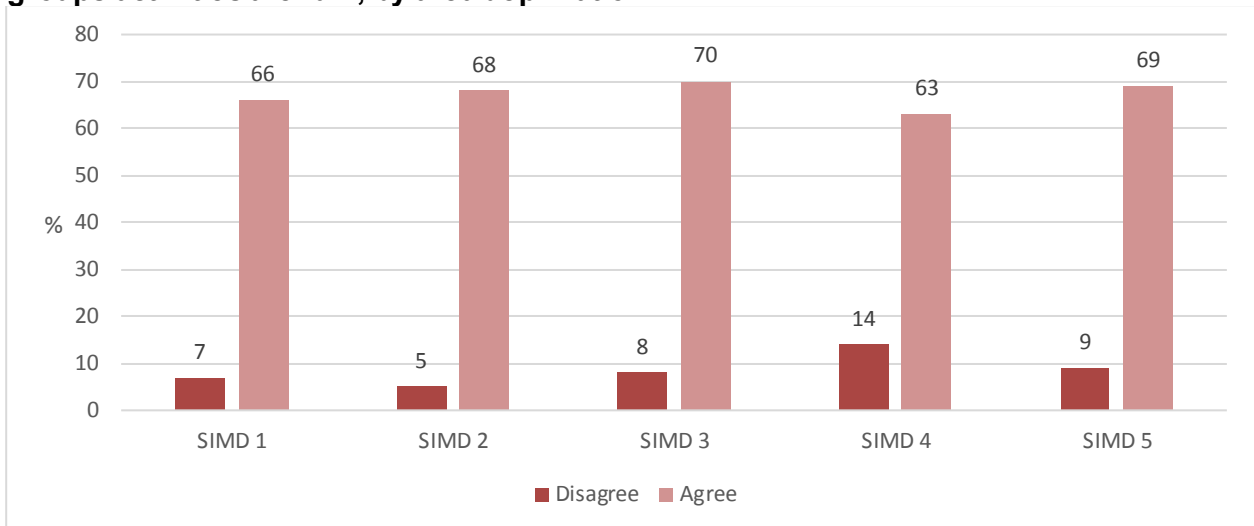
Figure 3.3 Agreement with the statement 'I feel able to let adults know my views on how the groups/activities are run', by school year



Base: 1085

Those with a mental or physical health condition were less likely to agree that adults who run these groups and activities were good at listening to them (65 per cent) than those without a health condition (75 per cent).

Figure 3.4 Agreement with the statement 'I feel able to let adults know my views on how the groups/activities are run', by area deprivation



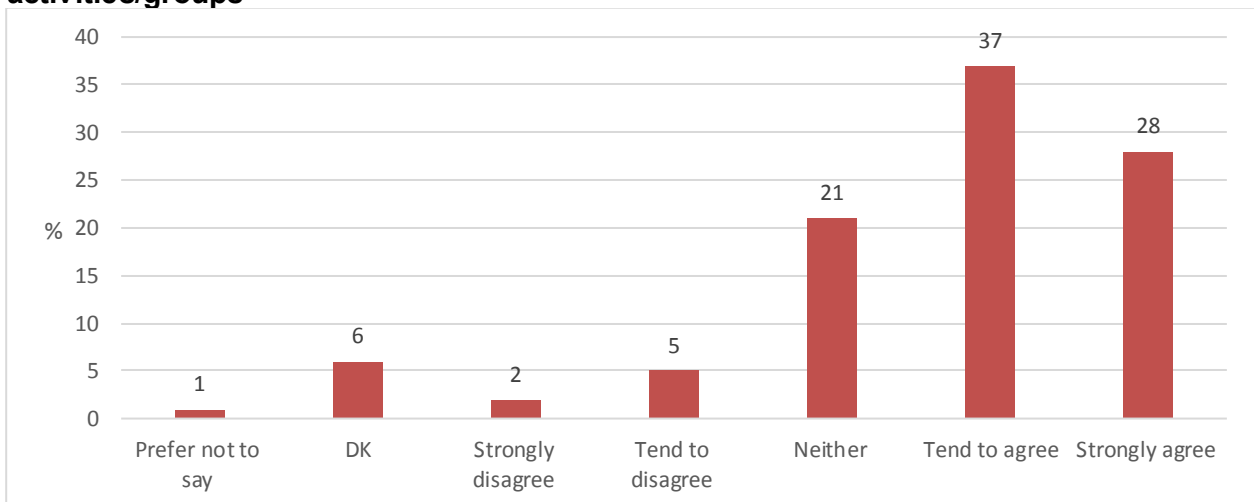
Base: 1085

As Figure 3.4 shows, those in SIMD 4 (63 per cent) were slightly less likely to agree that they could make their views known than those in other SIMD quintiles (66 per cent to 70 per cent).

Adults listening to young people

Pupils were also asked their perception of adults who run the groups and activities listening to their views. As Figure 3.5 shows, 65 per cent of respondents agreed that these adults were good at listening to their views, while 7 per cent disagreed.

Figure 3.5 Agreement with the statement 'Adults are good at listening to my views, in these activities/groups'



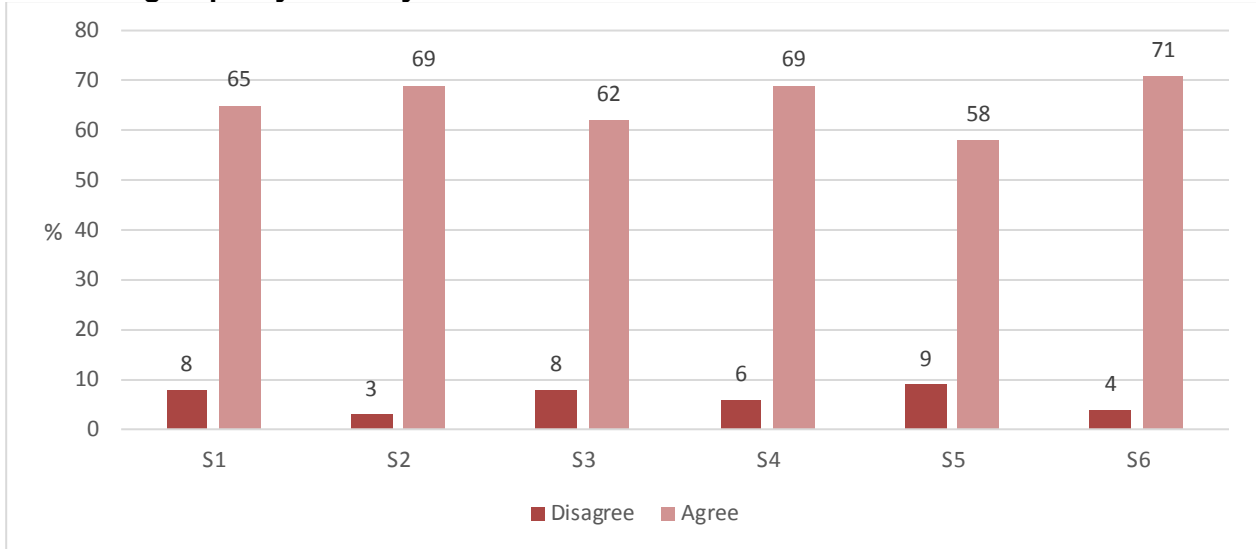
Base: 1085

Again there was little difference between responses in 2019 and 2017 (70 per cent agreed, 8 per cent disagreed).

Boys were slightly more likely to agree that that adults running the groups or activities were good at listening to their views (68 per cent) than girls (63%).

As Figure 3.6 shows, there was no consistent pattern between school years. S6 pupils were most likely to agree that adults running the groups or activities were good at listening to their views (71 per cent) while pupils in S5 were least likely to agree (58 per cent).

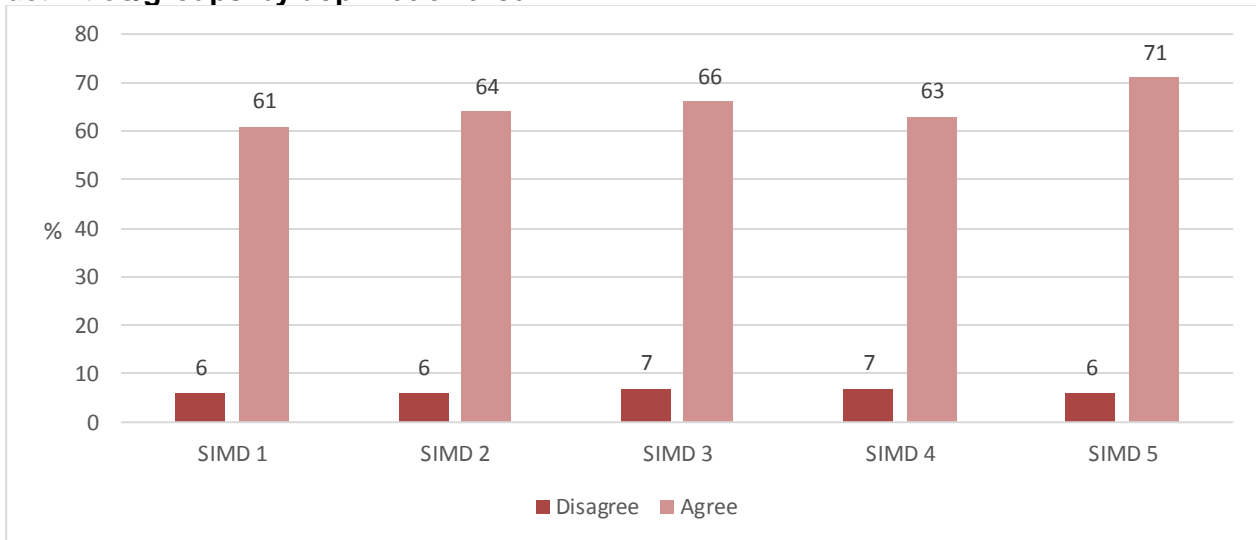
Figure 3.6 Agreement with the statement ‘Adults are good at listening to my views, in these activities/groups’ by school year



Base: 1085

Those with a mental or physical health condition were less likely to agree that adults who run these groups and activities were good at listening to them (62 per cent) than those without a health condition (67 per cent).

Figure 3.7 Agreement with the statement ‘Adults are good at listening to my views, in these activities/groups’ by deprivation area



Base: 1085

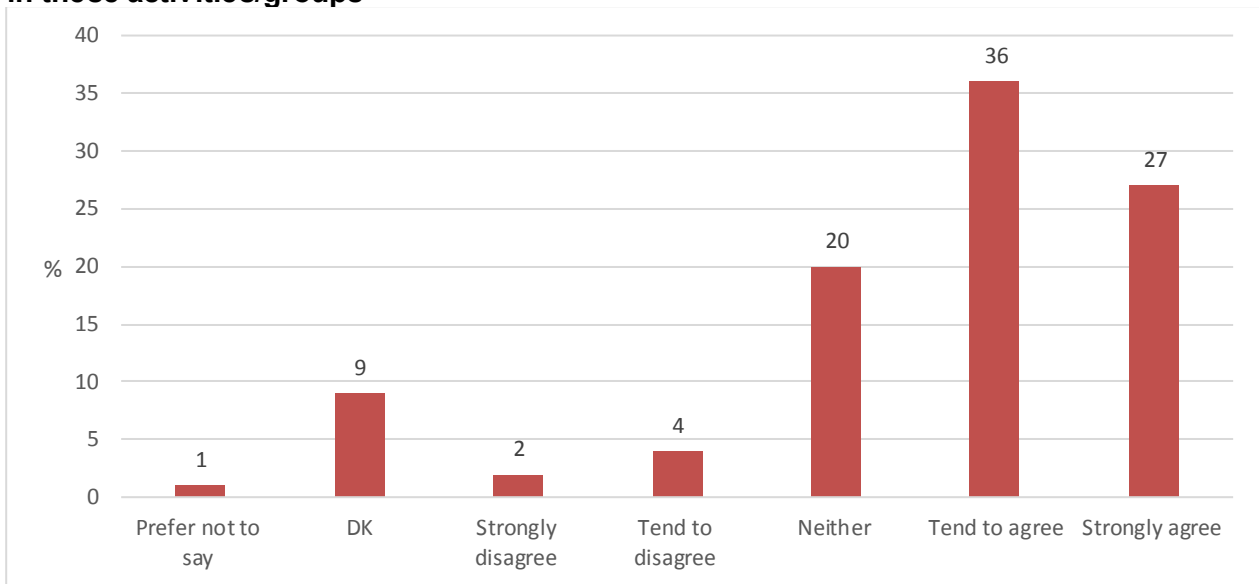
As Figure 3.7 shows, pupils from the least deprived SIMD quintile were most likely to agree that adults running the groups or activities were good at listening to their views (71 per cent), compared with those in the most deprived quintile (61 per cent).

Adults taking young people’s views into account

Pupils were asked how good the adults who run the groups or activities were at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them. As Figure 3.8 shows, 64 per cent agreed that adults were good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them, while 6 per cent disagreed.

Similar to the previous questions, there was no significant difference between responses in 2017.

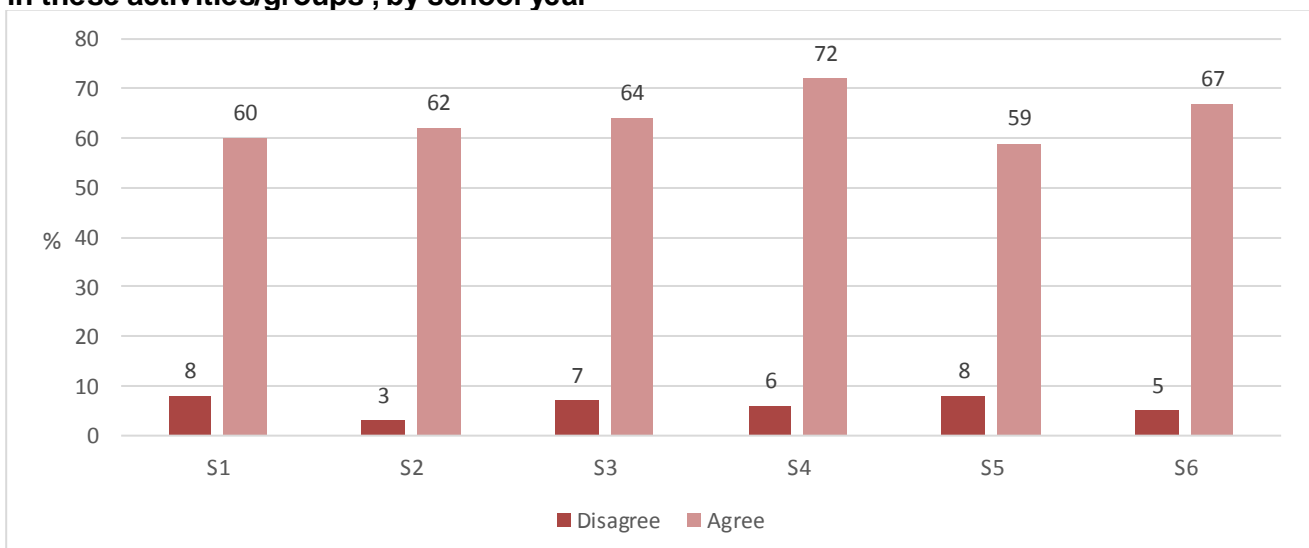
Figure 3.8 Agreement with the statement ‘Adults are good at taking my views into account, in these activities/groups’



Base: 1085

As Figure 3.9 shows, pupils in S4 were most likely to agree (72 per cent) that adults who run out of school activities were good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them. Pupils in S5 were least likely to agree (59 per cent).

Figure 3.9 Agreement with the statement ‘Adults are good at taking my views into account, in these activities/groups’, by school year

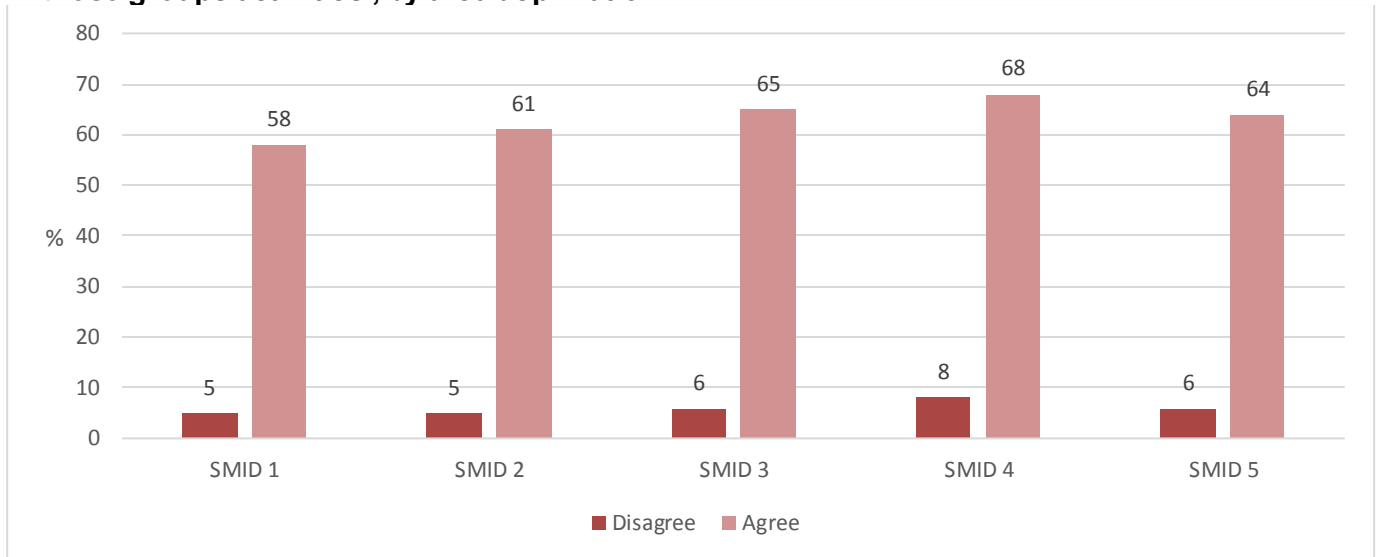


Base: 1085

Those with a mental or physical health condition were less likely to agree that adults who run groups and activities were good at taking their views into account (61 per cent) than those without (67 per cent).

As Figure 3.10 shows, those in most deprived SIMD quintile were less likely to agree (58 per cent) than those in the second least deprived quintile (68 per cent).

Figure 3.10 Agreement with the statement 'Adults are good at taking my views into account, in these groups/activities', by area deprivation



Base: 1085

There was no significant gender difference in response to this question.

4. Views on Decision making in schools

The survey also included a number of questions on how much say pupils have in the running of their school. Wording is slightly different as these questions were commissioned as part of a separate question set, but they complement the questions about out of school activities.

Pupils were asked how much say they have over:

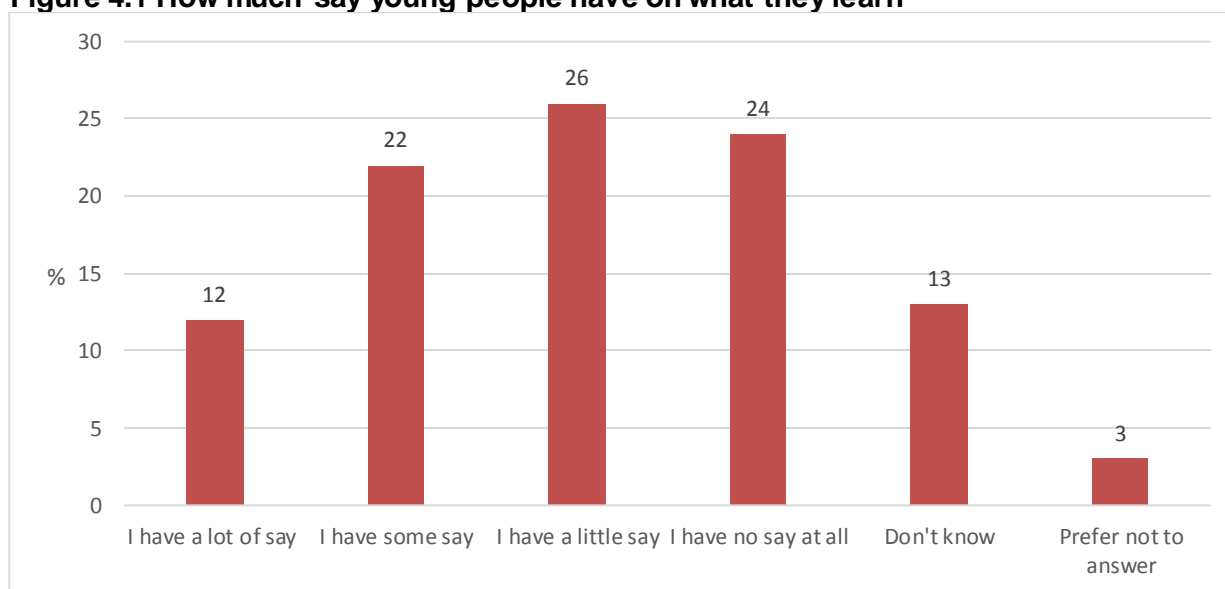
- What they learn
- How they learn, defined as 'which teaching and learning methods are used or which activities they do'
- Decisions which affect the school as a whole

What they learn

When asked how much say they have over what they learn in school, 34 per cent of pupils said that they had either 'a lot' or 'some' say in what they learn. Over half (51 per cent) said they had 'little' or 'no' say in in what they learn. Figure 4.1 Illustrates.

This pattern is similar to the pattern of responses in 2017 when 33 per cent of students said they had a lot or some say and 55 per cent said they had little or no say on what they learn.

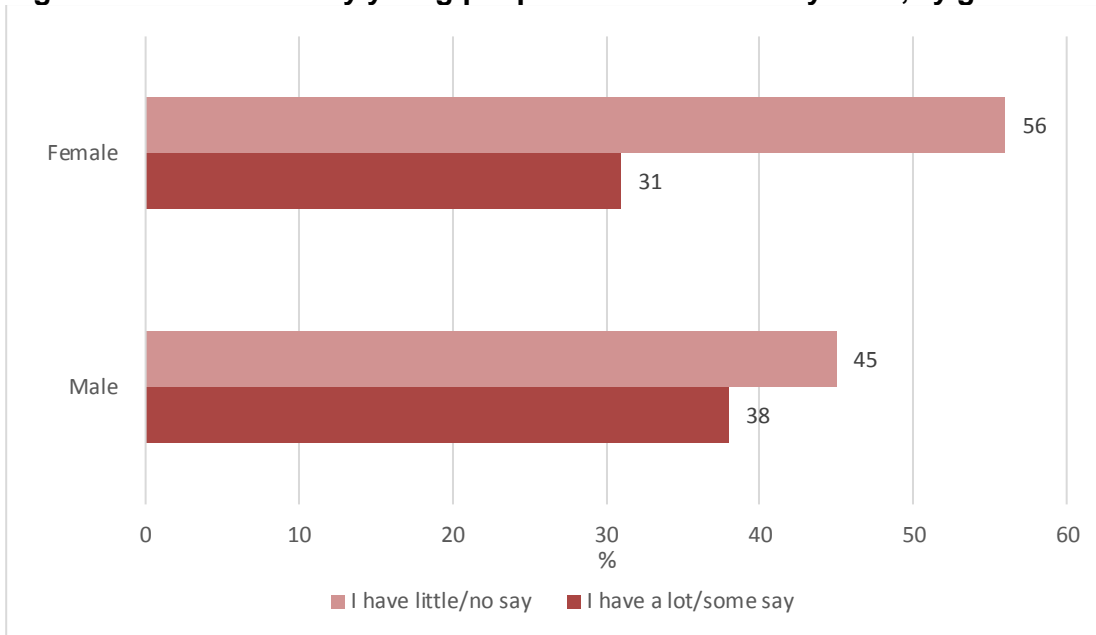
Figure 4.1 How much say young people have on what they learn



Base: 1731

As Figure 4.2 shows, boys were more positive than girls, with 38 per cent of boys saying that they had a lot of some say over what they learn, compared with 31 per cent of girls.

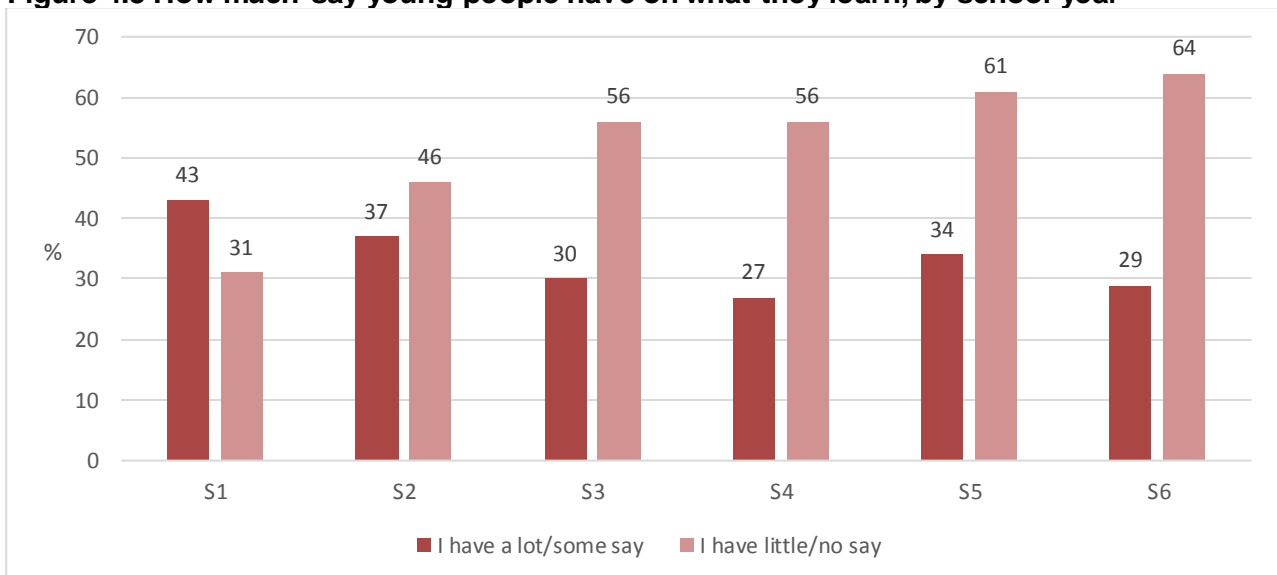
Figure 4.2 How much say young people have on what they learn, by gender



Base: 1731

As Figure 4.3 shows, those in S1 were the most positive, with 43 per cent agreeing they had a lot or some say, compared to around three in ten in S3-S6. The percentage of pupils who said that they had little or no say increased consistently with school year. Pupils in S6 were more than twice as likely to say they had little or no say (64 per cent) as pupils in S1 (31 per cent).

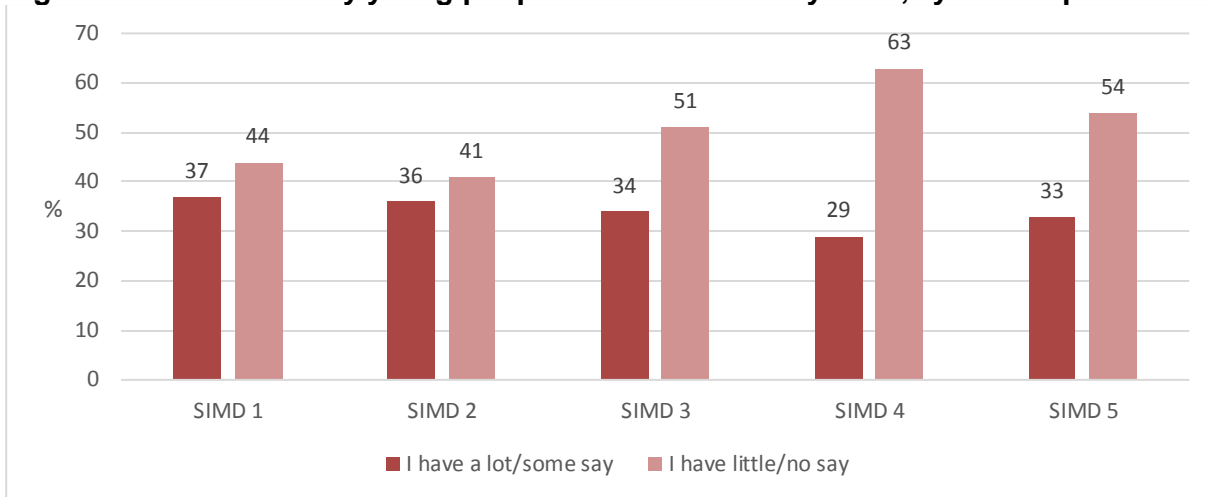
Figure 4.3 How much say young people have on what they learn, by school year



Base: 1731

Differences by area deprivation were not large in terms of the percentage indicating they have a lot or some say, although those in the two most deprived areas were slightly more positive than those in the other quintiles. Those in the SIMD 4 were also the most likely to say that they had little or no say. Figure 4.4 illustrates.

Figure 4.4 How much say young people have on what they learn, by area deprivation

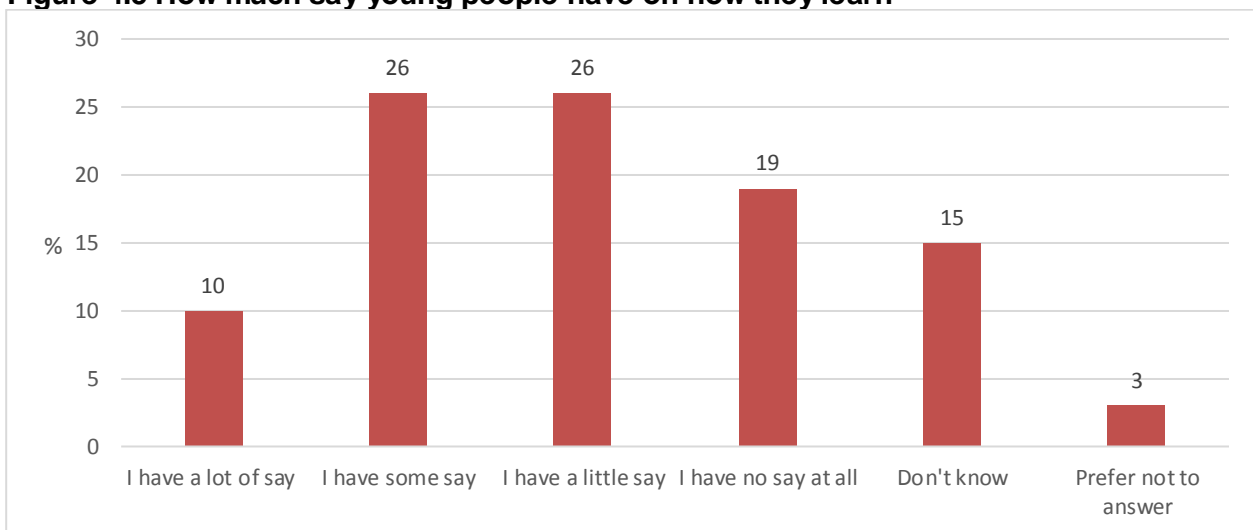


Base: 1731

How they learn

When asked about how they learn, 45 per cent said that they had ‘little’ or ‘no’ say in how they learn while 36 per cent said that they had ‘a lot’ or ‘some’ say. Figure 4.5 illustrates.

Figure 4.5 How much say young people have on how they learn

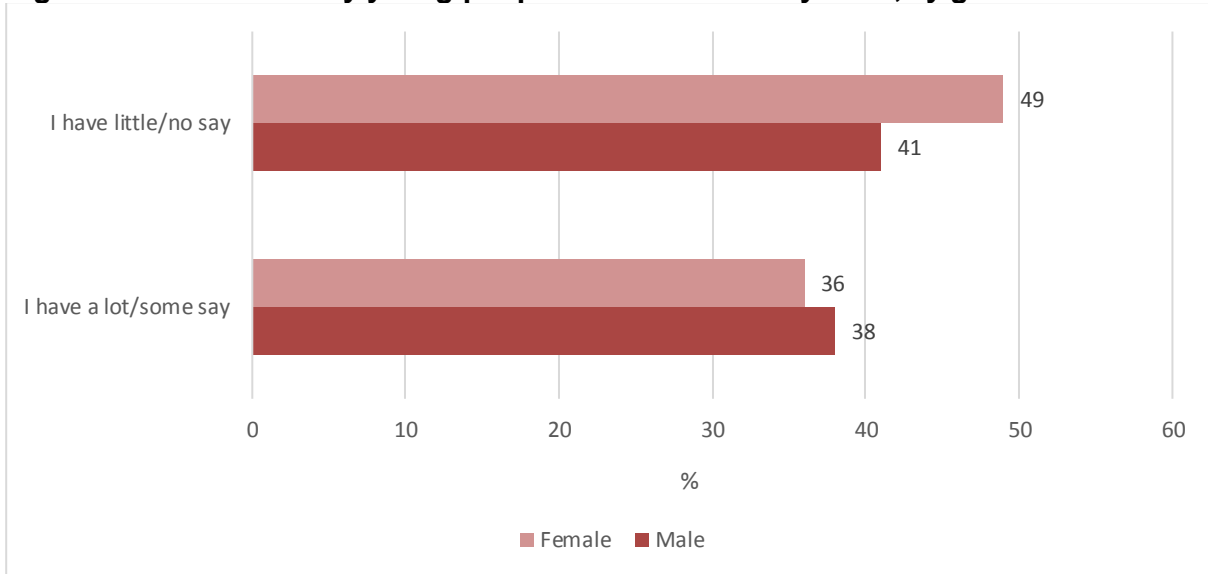


Base: 1731

Again, there was little difference between responses in 2019 and 2017, when 48 per cent said they had little or no say and 39 per cent said they had some or a lot of say.

As Figure 4.6 shows, there was little difference in the percentage of boys and girls who said they had a lot or some say, but girls were more likely to say that they had little or no say (49 per cent) than boys (41 per cent).

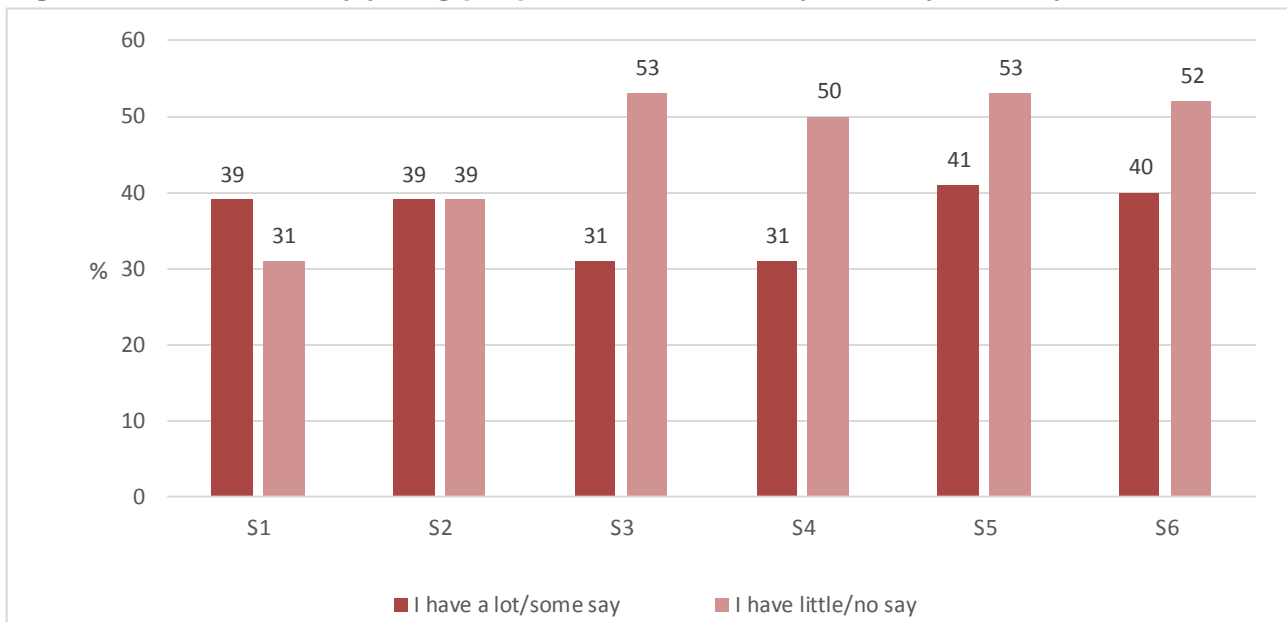
Figure 4.6 How much say young people have on how they learn, by gender



Base: 1731

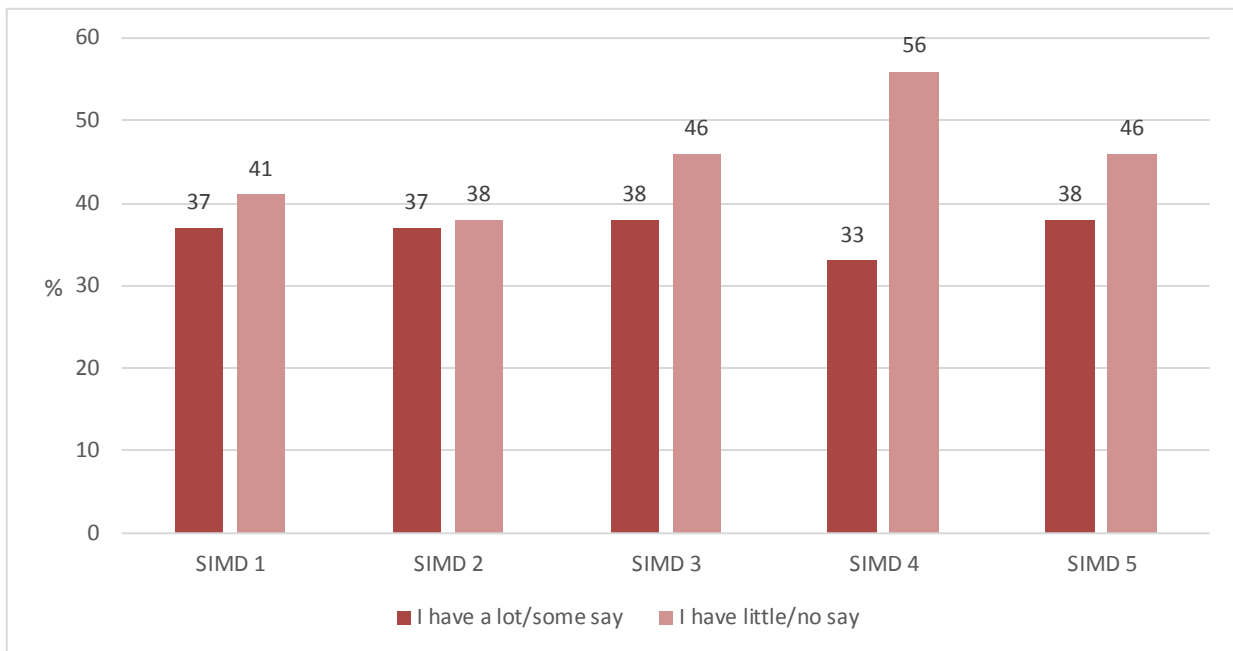
In terms of school year, respondents in S3 and S4 were less likely (both 31 per cent) to say that they had a lot or some say than both the lower and higher older school years (39 to 41 per cent). Figure 4.7 illustrates.

Figure 4.7 How much say young people have on how they learn, by school year



There was no consistent pattern by area deprivation and differences were not large. Figure 4.8 illustrates.

Figure 4.8 How much say young people have on how they learn, by area deprivation



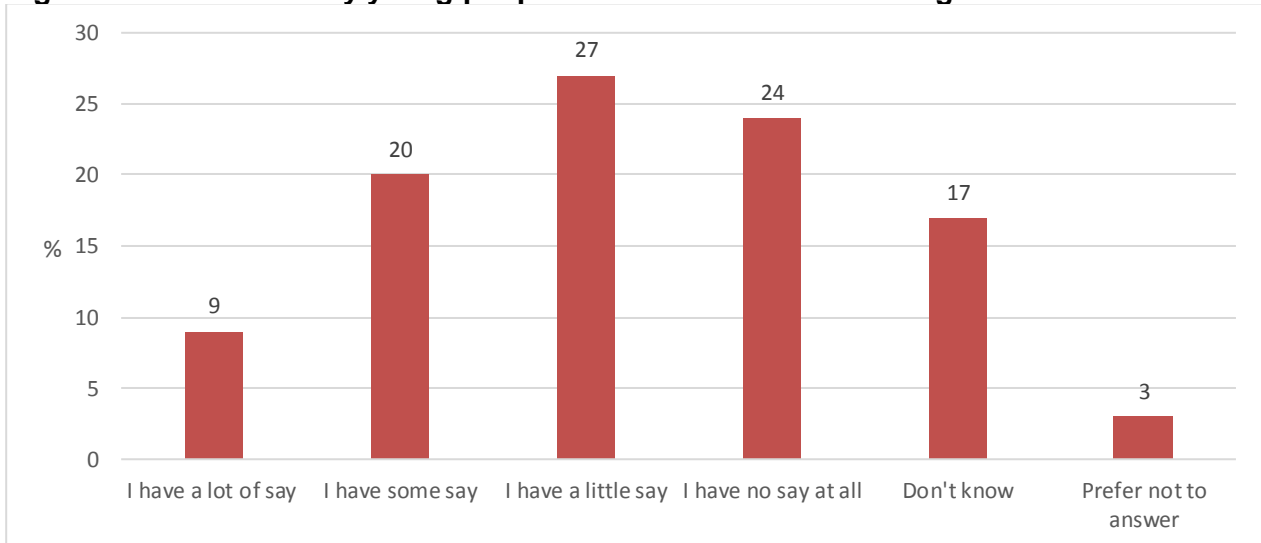
Base: 1731

Decisions affecting the whole school

Survey respondents were asked how much say they had over decisions that affect the whole school. As Figure 4.9 shows, around three in ten (29 per cent) said they had ‘a lot’ or ‘some’ say, while just over half of respondents said that they had ‘little’ or ‘no’ say on decisions that affect the whole school.

There was no significant difference between responses to this question and responses when the question was asked in 2017.

Figure 4.9 How much say young people have on decisions affecting the school as a whole.

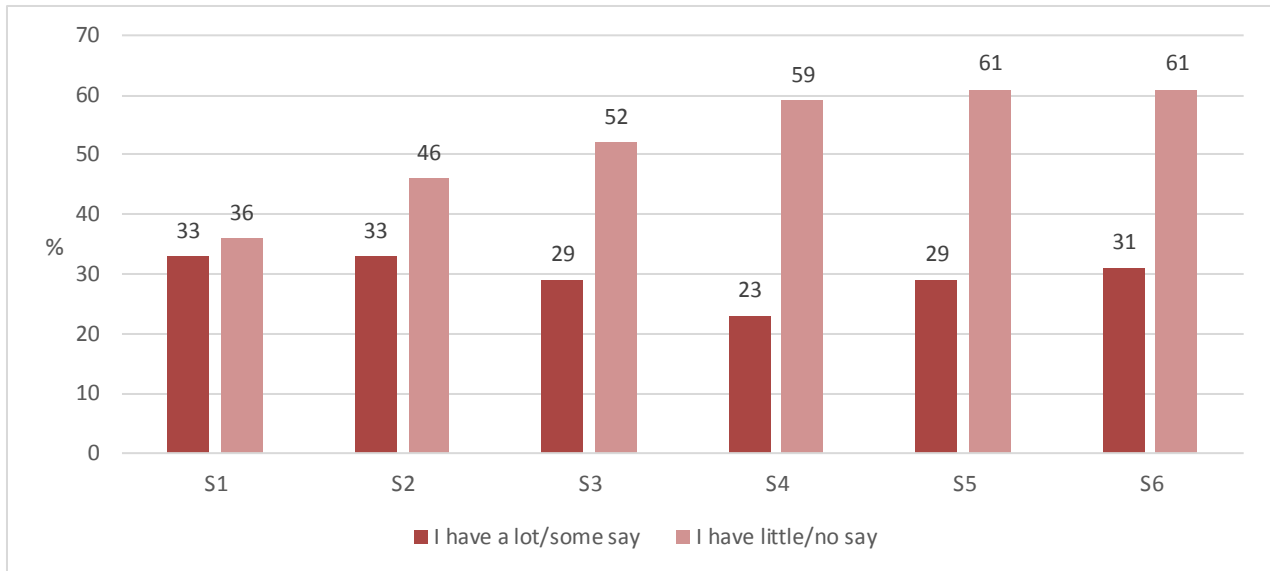


Base: 1731

The percentage who said that they had ‘little’ or ‘no’ say on decisions that affect the whole school increased with school year. The difference between S1 and S6 was large: 36 per cent of pupils in S1 said that they had ‘little’ or ‘no’ say on decisions

that affect the whole school compared to pupils in S5 and S6 (both 61 per cent). There was no consistent pattern by school year of those who said they had ‘a lot’ or ‘some’ say on decisions that affect the whole school. However, those in S1 and S2 were most likely (both 33 per cent) to say that they had ‘a lot’ or ‘some’ say, compared with pupils in S4 (23 per cent). Figure 4.10 illustrates.

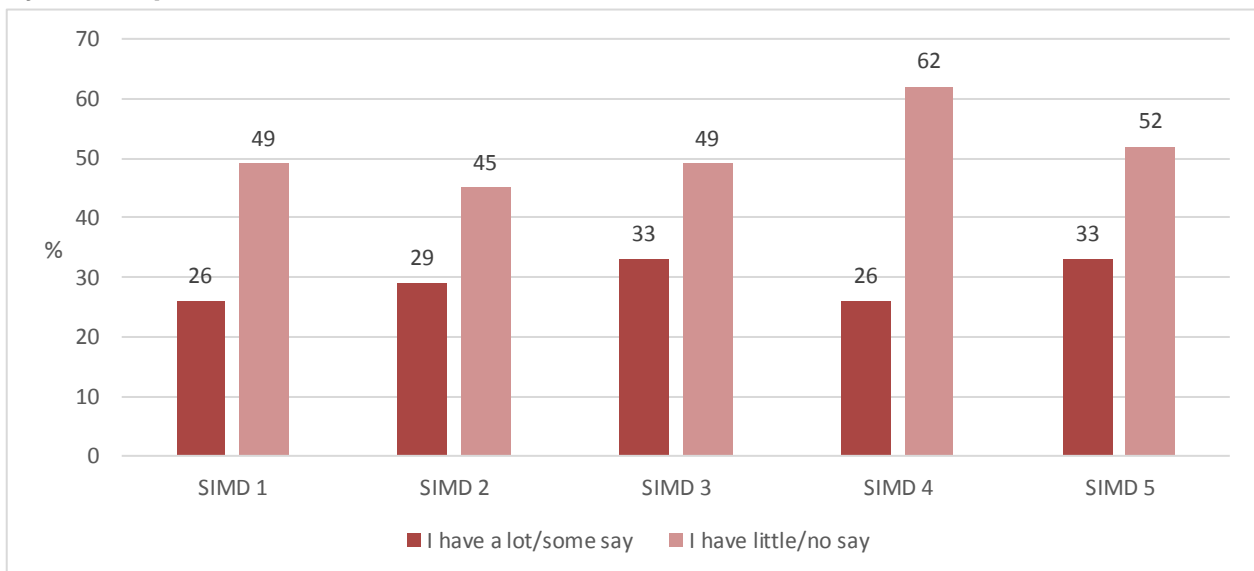
Figure 4.10 How much say young people have on decisions affecting the school as a whole, by school year



Base: 1731

As Figure 4.11 shows, there was no consistent directional pattern by area deprivation

Figure 4.11 How much say young people have on decisions affecting the school as a whole, by area deprivation



Base: 1731

There was no significant gender difference in response to this question.



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